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ABSTRACT

To gather descriptive data regarding basic characteristics of existing standardized programs and to determine the extent to which the programs have been adopted and replicated following their initial development, a questionnaire was designed and sent to the developers of 20 standardized behavior intervention programs serving normal and moderately to severely handicapped individuals in school, home/residential, and work settings. Among findings collected from 17 respondents were that 82.4% had observed "program drift" (gradual deterioration in the quality of program implementation); that the practices of using demonstration and training centers and of providing long term training (more than once a week) in program procedures were rated most effective in getting standardized programs into the field; and that the problem which was the most serious to developers was the lack of sufficient funding to implement programs with maximum care and precision. Respondents offered suggestions (such as to develop an efficient quality control system) for reducing program drift. (SBH)

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Standardized Intervention Programs:
Preliminary Data on Descriptive Characteristics,
Methods of Dissemination and Problems of Implementation

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Dissemination Survey

In an effort to gather descriptive data regarding basic characteristics of existing standardized programs and to determine the extent to which the programs have been adopted and replicated following their initial development, a questionnaire was designed and sent to the developers of 20 standardized behavioral intervention programs.

The Survey

The survey was structured to provide 1) descriptive information about each program, 2) program replication and survival data, 3) lists of dissemination strategies and quality control procedures which the program had used, and 4) a list of problems program staff had encountered in trying to get the program adopted and correctly implemented by potential users.

The Respondents

Survey respondents were identified through the published literature on their programs, through reference materials supplied by the Office of Education's Joint Dissemination Review Panel (JDRP) and through a referral process in which they were asked to identify program developers whose names were not on an initial mailing list. The number of developers sampled was necessarily small because the number of projects, nationwide, meeting the criteria for standardized intervention programs is small. Of the 20 developers sampled, 17 responded to the questionnaire--a return rate of 85%.

The Results

Program characteristics. The target settings, populations, and behaviors of the programs for which data are available are outlined in Table 1. Of the 17 programs for which data were obtained, ten were

designed for use in school settings, five were intended for home or other residential settings, and two were work-related. The largest group of persons for whom programs have been developed are elementary school students, with four programs each directed toward their academic and their socially appropriate behavior. Counting across target populations, four programs also have been developed for intervening with children in multiple skill development areas.

Replication and survival data. Program replication and survival data are detailed in Table 2. Thirteen of the seventeen developers responding to the survey provided such data. Three were unable to do so because of the form in which their programs were made available to potential users--completely packaged with no developer involvement in adoption decisions or implementation efforts--and one reported no replications. For the thirteen programs contributing such data, the adjusted mean number of full program replications achieved to date was 22.3 (standard deviation = 21.2; range = 4-175; median = 17.5).

The mean survival index for these programs was 89.1% (standard deviation = 12.2%; range = 60-100%; median = 93.0%). This means that, on the average 89.1% of all replications achieved by these models are still in operation. For the replication projects which have been terminated, the mean duration of survival was 30.2 months, or just over two-and-one-half years (standard deviation = 17.4 months; range = 12-54 months; median = 26.5 months). This translates to an average discontinuation rate of one project every 27.1 months of the model's existence.

82.4% of the developers responding to the survey reported that they had observed "program drift" (gradual deterioration in the quality of

program implementation) among one or more of their surviving projects and had to work to contain (and hopefully could reverse) it. Only 70.6% of the survey respondents reported that they continued to monitor a site's program implementation following initial adoption. Given the seeming tendency of programs to drift away from standardized models, continued monitoring--as well as on-going technical and moral support, when possible--would seem to be important determinants of program survival.

Dissemination strategy data. From a list of program dissemination strategies provided, survey participants were asked to designate those which they had used and, based on their experience, to rate the effectiveness of each. These data are summarized in Figure 1. Not surprisingly, the practices of using demonstration and training centers and of providing long-term training (more than one week) in program procedures were rated most effective in getting standardized programs into the field. Also not surprisingly, these practices were among the least frequently used--likely because of costs and other logistical problems associated with their use. Short-term training, training films and videotapes, professional publications, and conference presentation (such as this one) were among the most frequently used dissemination strategies, but were all rated somewhat less effective than "live" and/or intensive training procedures. Somewhat surprisingly, professional publications were rated as least useful of the strategies presented, and commercial publications--with its marketing capability--was used least often. Other strategies added by respondents included recruitment of potential program users and influential others by program developers.

Quality control strategy data. The survey required participants to check and rate the usefulness of each program quality control strategy they had used from a list of several such practices. These data are displayed in Figure 2. Long-term training, used by nearly three-fourths of the participants as a quality control mechanism, uniformly was rated as highly effective ($\bar{x}$ rating = 5.0, s.d. = 0, on a 5-point scale). Staff consultants, short-term training, and data management services were the most frequently relied upon quality control procedures--their use being reported by 16 of the 17 survey respondents. All strategies on this list received mean ratings of moderately to highly effective--a finding suggesting that given that a replication is going to occur or already is underway, most any reasonable continued involvement on the part of the developers will be helpful in assuring that the quality of the program is high. Strategies added to the list by respondents included payments to replication personnel for implementing program procedures with high fidelity, providing regular feedback to implementation staff, and holding regular meetings of persons with key replication responsibilities.

Implementation problem data. From a list of potential problems in program use, developers were asked to designate the three problems which had been the most troublesome to them in implementing their programs with adopting agencies. Figure 3 summarizes these data. The problem which clearly was the most serious to developers was the lack of sufficient funding to implement programs with maximum care and precision. Policies of the user agency and of related regulatory agencies were rated second and third. The problem which was cited most often by developers was regulating program use by line staff--assuring fidelity of treatment at the point of interface between the program and the target population--a

most basic issue in the implementation of standardized intervention programs. Other problems added to the list by respondents included lack of strong administrative support, lack of desire on the part of users to achieve behavior change, and limited time to bring staff to criterion on critical procedures.

TABLE 1

PROGRAM CHARACTERISTICS
(N = 17)

PROGRAM SETTINGS

SCHOOL (10)

Elementary School Students (8)

Academic Behavior (4)

Socially Appropriate Behavior (4)

Preschool Children

Multiple Skill Development Areas

Moderately to Severely Handicapped Persons (1)

Multiple Skill Development Areas

HOME/RESIDENTIAL (5)

Moderately to Severely Handicapped Persons (3)

Self-Help Skills (2)

Multiple Skill Development Areas (1)

Aggressive/Dependent-Neglected/Pre-Delinquent (2)

Socially Appropriate Behavior (1)

Multiple Skill Development Areas (1)

WORK (2)

Unemployed Normal Adults (1)

Job-Finding Skills

Severely Handicapped Adults (1)

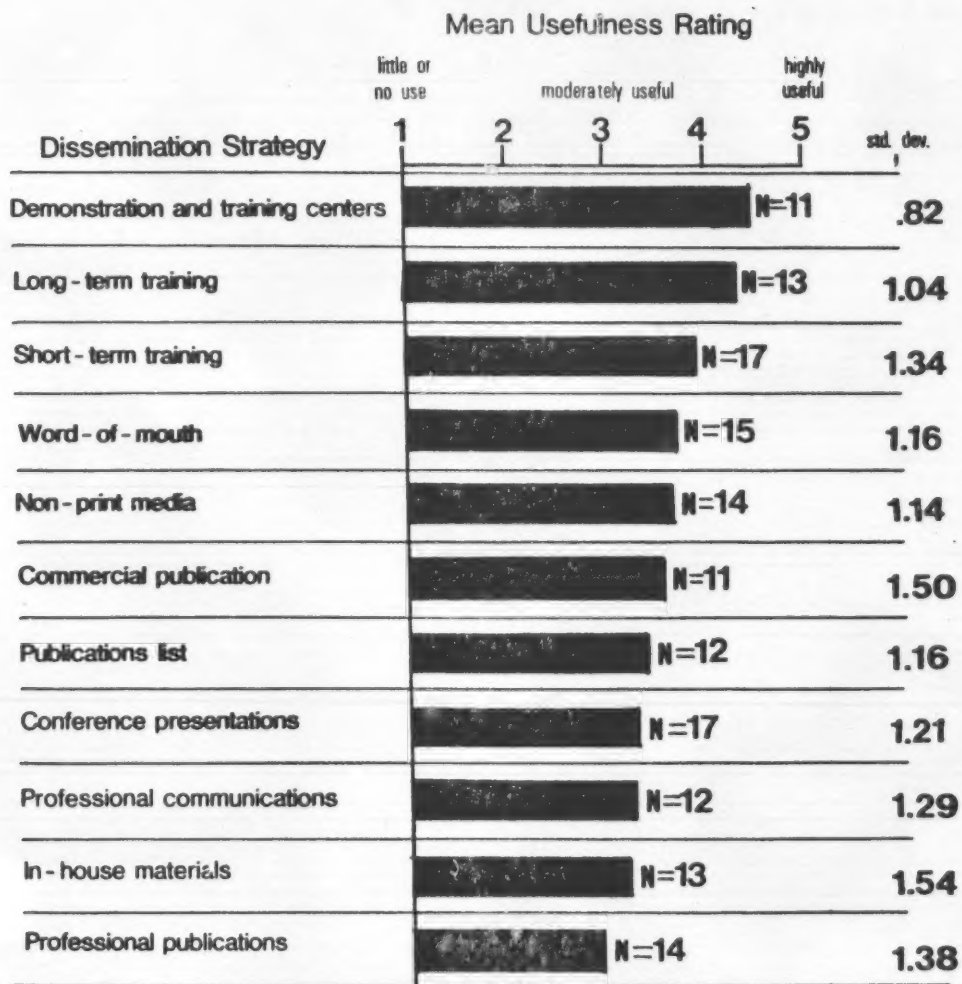
Vocational/Community Living Skills

TABLE 2
REPLICATION AND SURVIVAL DATA FOR
17 STANDARDIZED INTERVENTION PROGRAMS

		# of Full Replications	Survival Percentage	X Duration of Terminated Projects	I Program Discontinued every ____ mos	Continued Monitoring? Yes No	Program Drift? Yes No
SCHOOL PROGRAMS							
Elementary Students Program	1	20	75%	54 months	26.4	*	*
	2	15	100	d.n.a.	d.n.a.	*	*
	3	150	82	12	2.4	*	*
	4	66	95	24	16.0	*	*
	5	12	100	d.n.a.	d.n.a.	*	*
	6	35	97	n.s.	72.0		*
	7	0	d.n.a.	d.n.a.	d.n.a.	*	*
	8	(I N F O R M A T I O N U N A V A I L A B L E)				*	*
Preschool Students Program	9	10	90	29 months	52.0	*	*
Mod.-Sev. Hand. Studts. Program	10	350	93	48 months	2.9	*	*
HOME/RES. PROGRAMS							
Aggressive/Pre-Delinq./Dep./Neglected Program	11	175	86	n.s.	n.s.	*	*
	12	5	60	14 months	18.0	*	*
Mod.-Sev. Hand. Studts. Program	13	50	80	n.s.	n.s.	*	*
	14	(I N F O R M A T I O N U N A V A I L A B L E)				*	*
	15	(I N F O R M A T I O N U N A V A I L A B L E)				*	*
WORK RELATED PROGRAMS							
Unemployed Norm. Adults Program	16	6	100	d.n.a.	d.n.a.	*	*
Sev. Hand. Adults Program	17	4	100	d.n.a.	d.n.a.	*	*
N		14	13	6	7	70.6%	82.4%
Mean		22.3	89.1	30.2 months	27.1 mos		
Std. Dev.		21.2	12.2	17.4 months	25.9 mos		
Range		0 - 350	60 - 100	12-54 months	2.4-72.0 mos		
Median		17.5	93.0%	26.5 months	18.0 mos		

FIGURE 1

Mean Usefulness Ratings for Selected Program Dissemination Strategies



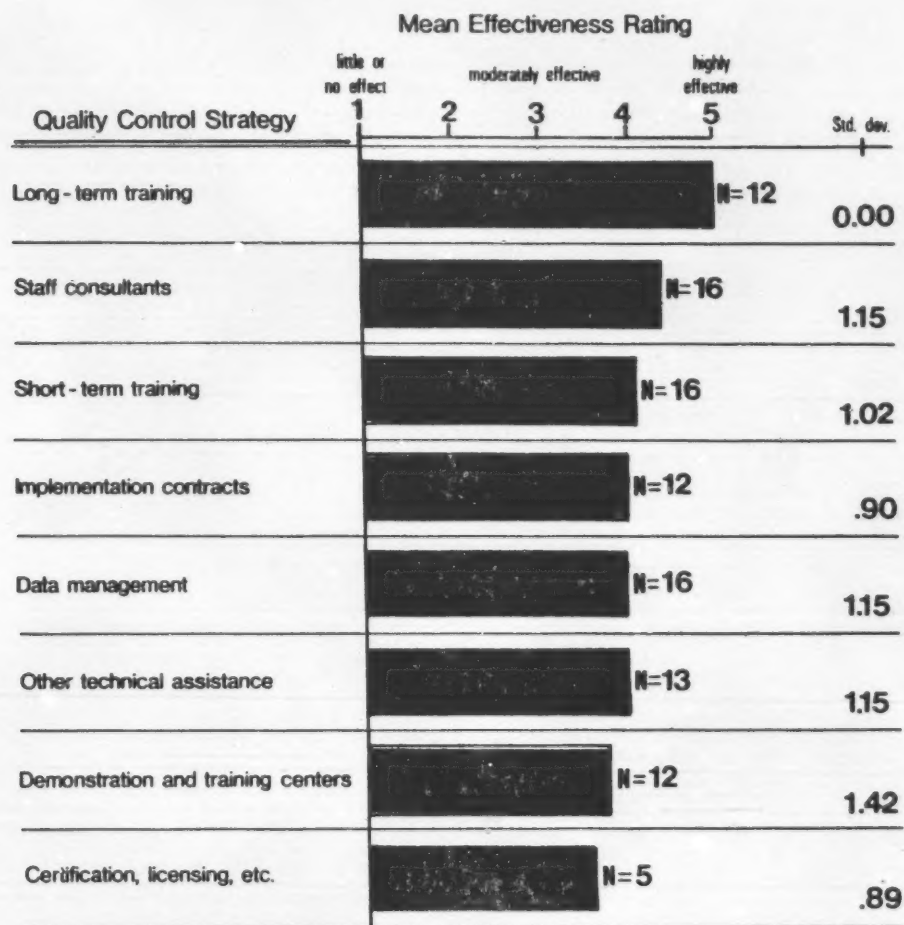
OTHER STRATEGIES MENTIONED:

Telephone conference calls

Direct, on-going work with
community leaders and
program directors

FIGURE 2

Mean Effectiveness Ratings for Selected Program Quality Control Strategies



OTHER STRATEGIES MENTIONED:

Special conferences for select groups of trained persons

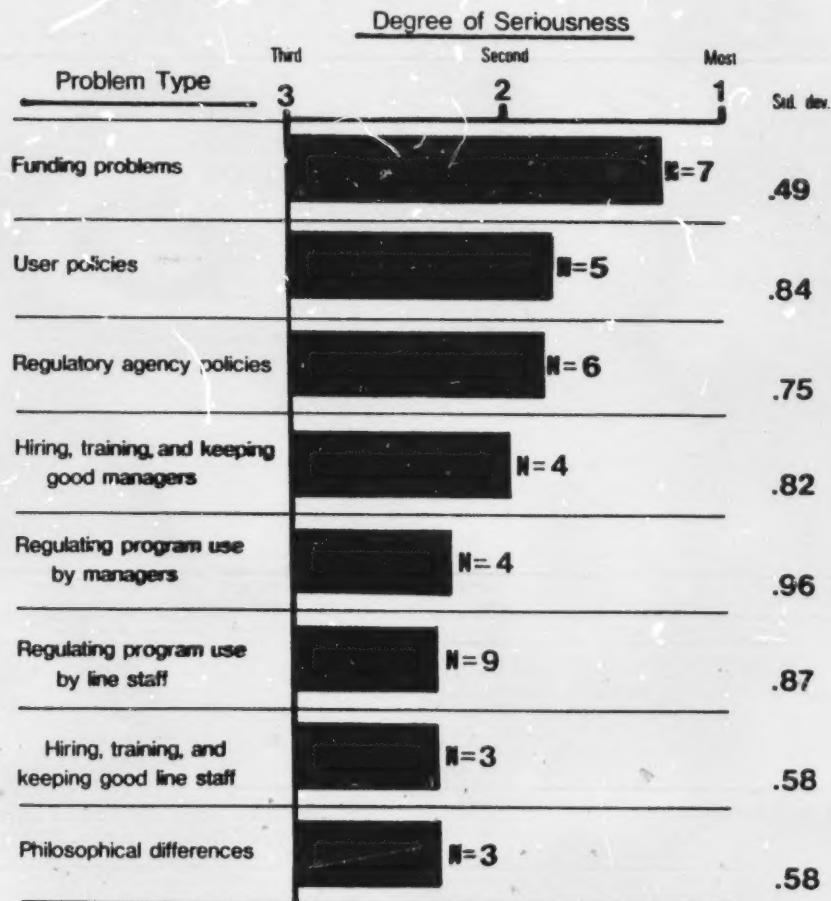
Payments to implementation personnel

Provision of regular feedback to implementers on their success
based on the performance of target population in the program

Quarterly meetings of replication site directors

FIGURE 3

Mean Rank Scores for Selected Program Implementation Problems



OTHER PROBLEMS MENTIONED:

Effectiveness of program/comparative effectiveness to alternative programs

Feasibility of program

Desire of users to achieve behavior change

Obtaining/maintaining strong support from administrative staff

Obtaining sufficient time for line staff to achieve competence w/program after training

Generating stable referrals of appropriate service recipients (getting others to refer)

Discovering/solving problems in model design/operation as they arise (troubleshooting)

Respondents' Suggestions for Reducing Program Drift

Respondents to the Program Dissemination Survey were asked if they had observed instances of "program drift" (gradual deterioration over time in the quality or fidelity of program implementation) and, if so, what they thought could be done to prevent or reverse the phenomenon.

They made the following suggestions:

1. Develop an efficient quality control system; monitor student process measures frequently and carefully; work to regain/retain program control when drift is noticed.
2. Increase the number of training sessions provided to implementing staff so that all involved staff can understand rationale, carry out procedures at a mastery level, and thus become committed to the program.
3. Conduct additional on-site visits to adopting agencies at periodic intervals or when indications of program drift begin to appear. Adjust the schedule and structure of consultation to meet the needs of the adopting agency.
4. Ensure that the adopting agency holds the conviction that the program fits their needs before implementation progresses beyond the initial stages. In particular, ensure that administrative support is solid before proceeding.

5. Provide Consultation to adopting agencies in how to adopt a new program successfully and how to ensure its survival by incorporating it into standard agency practices.
6. Find additional sources of funding to strengthen replication efforts.
7. Develop procedures for better selection of replication personnel, better incentives for them, and better supervision of them.
8. Demonstrate program use (as opposed to or in addition to describing it) whenever possible through use of workshops, videotape, demonstration and training centers, etc.
9. Distinguish between essential (non-negotiable), desirable, and negotiable program characteristics and direct replication energy toward high fidelity implementation of those program components which define the model and are indispensable.¹
10. Structure the replication carefully through use of a detailed implementation contract which specifies the roles and responsibilities of all persons involved in the effort.

¹I am indebted to Matt Timm (Regional Intervention Program Expansion Project, Nashville, Tennessee) for first making this point clear to me.

On-going Program Monitoring Procedures

Identified by Survey Respondents

1. Data management/management information systems.
2. Site visits by consultants (consultant reports/feedback).
3. Audiotape/videotape exchange (developers send demonstration tapes to adopters; adopters send tapes of their use of the same procedures to developers; developers provide feedback).¹
4. Periodic telephone contact
5. Periodic mail contact
6. Periodic (quarterly, semi-annual or annual) surveys, evaluations, or site audits.

¹I am grateful to Matt Fleischman (TEACH Project, Oregon Social Learning Center, Eugene) for identifying this procedure.